The Builder.

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OUR readers will not be surprised to hear that the Metropolitan Sewers Commission, tried and found wanting, is *dissolved*. We have been looking for the Lord Chancellor's *supersedeas* for some time past, and it has now come; whether for the purpose, simply, of ridding the board of one or two of its members found troublesome by those with most influence, or that it may be wholly reconstructed, remains to be seen. To the constitution of the board we objected in the first instance, protesting strongly and repeatedly against the systematic exclusion of professional and practical men. Its unsatisfactory proceedings, its position in the estimation of the country, and its premature extinction, fully justify our views. And yet while we have found it our duty to object in plain and strong language to the course pursued on too many occasions, we will not go so far as those who say that the late commission has done *nothing*; and we have withheld quires of complaints against it, and so offended a portion of the public, because we believed that those complaints were founded on misapprehension of its province and powers. But that it has failed miserably,—that it has shown itself incompetent for the Herculean task committed to its charge, is certain and undeniable.

We will not at this moment speculate on the probable constitution of the new board: a very short time will elapse before the question will be set at rest, for we cannot suppose that the Government will allow matters connected with the drainage of the metropolis to stand still a single week. It has been suggested in our pages, on more than one occasion, that the board should be representative, or partly so. One of our correspondents suggested that half the commissioners should be appointed by the Crown, and half elected; that there should be twelve or twenty commissioners to each district, according to the size, and that "each district commission should elect one of its body to be one of a general committee, who should have power to determine all questions affecting the general interest, and decide upon plans for general drainage."* Speculation, however, is useless, as by this time the matter is settled.

And now *as to* the plans for general drainage, which were submitted to the late commission in reply to their appeal to the public. We are anxious to say a few words in behalf of the parties who responded to this invitation, although we fear there is little chance of their obtaining any advantageous return for their labour, unless, indeed, the new commission may be led to vote some compensation to those competitors who have furnished the more useful designs.

In our article of September 8th (p. 421, *ante*) we were compelled to remark, when speaking of the appeal to the public for plans, that if there were no other proof on record of the unfitness of the majority of the commissioners for their position, the thoughtlessness, must we add ignorance, which characterized the course taken would suffice, and afterwards this same view was adopted by one of the late commission, the Rev. Morgan Cowie, who submitted a written protest against the proceedings, fearing probably, and with justice, that if he did not do so, his fitness for the office of principal at the College of Engineers might be questioned.

That others of the commissioners had felt the necessity of affording to the competitors further data to proceed upon is evidenced by the fact that one of them, Mr. Hume, addressed a letter to the surveyor, who, on the day first fixed for receiving the plans, memorialized the court for an extension of the time,—asking him what information he thought desirable to enable surveyors to prepare "the best and most comprehensive plan for so great and important an undertaking." "I see the difficulties," continued Mr. Hume, "but not the means of removing them at present, and therefore wait for information." The reply of the party addressed showed how he thought the difficulties might be met: he said,—

"I write, in the earnest hope that, by your influence and advocacy, such information will be *directly* afforded as will induce professional men of reputation and business to come forward with designs on the 1st of October next. At present it may be justly assumed that none but those who, being connected with the commission, possessed the desired data by virtue of their office, and those who, having little practically to engage their attention, have managed to acquire these data by indirect means, are qualified to compete for an object as well worthy the talents and attention of the most exalted professional minds as any object that has ever presented itself for public competition. No palace, no church, no cartoon painting, was more worthy 'a prize for the best design' than the origination of the best principle upon which to drain the metropolis, and I therefore submit to you that it is desirable not only to give the required data, but to offer distinctly a prize or prizes for such designs as may be considered by competent judges worthy of some mark of distinction.

The information which ought to be supplied to each competitor is—

An outline (reduced) plan of the whole district, for which an improved outfall is now sought.

On this map should be shown, simply—

1. The main streets.
2. Rivers and open watercourses.
3. Open and covered *main sewers* from their source (as sewers) to their outlets: along the course of each river, watercourse, and main sewer, simple figures should express the various falls or gradients, and the depth of the bottom of each below the surface of the ground; thus, $\frac{1 \text{ in } 480}{20}$ would represent a fall of ½ inch in 10 feet and 20 feet below surface. This information should be as perfect as it can possibly be afforded by the court within the limited time. At the beginning and end of each main sewer the height, with respect to Trinity datum and low-water line at their several outlets, should be particularly given; thus,

45′ *a*TD 13′ 2″ *b*TD.

Sewer.

→ 4′ 4″ *a*LW.

The heights of surface of ground (independent of the sewers) at various and frequent spots throughout the whole district to be operated upon having reference to one datum (Trinity high-water) should be given; thus, (45) meaning 45 feet above datum at the spot on which it is figured. Whatever borings have been taken should be appended by index to the map."

About sixty plans had been *sent in* at this time, it must be remembered. The court, when they extended the time after receiving these sixty, ordered some additional information to be supplied to competitors, which reached them but a very few days before the expiration of the time fixed, and was wholly insufficient.*

The result, as a matter of course, is, that the plans are all incomplete;—the competitors have laboured in vain;—the "best plan" has yet to be prepared.

The "concise statements" of the plans sent in before the 20th August last, form a pamphlet, small folio in size, of ninety pages, and are from fifty-three competitors. The names of these are, following the printed order, Messrs. H. Austin, J. T. Barkley, G. Burge, J. H. Clive, F. Coxworthy, J. W. Couchman, M. Dunn, R. Dover, A. Doull, Dredge and Stephenson, J. Dean, R. Dixon, J. Elliott, Chas. Fowler, F. Finlay, J. Faulkner, J. Gibbs, C. Hutton Gregory, J. T. Harrison, M. Kerridge, T. Lunt, John Martin, Martin, Sowerby, and Hodgson Jones, T. Morris, J. B. M'Clean, J. Murray, John Phillips, T. W. Plum, Joseph Prestwich, Jas. Pilbrow, G. Remington, Jasper Rogers, J. B. Redman, Ross and Low, F. Roe, Rumball and Shepherd, R. Rettie, W. Radley, W. Stewart, J. Pigot Smith, J. Sutton, F. Swinburne, Herbert L. Smith, C. Sanderson, B. G. Sloper, Harcourt Thompson, Tate and Gilmore, E. Wharmby, F. Wood, and Professor Wallace. The other plans are anonymous.†

According to the statement of the late secretary, Mr. Woolrych, on the 3rd inst., fifty-four plans have been submitted since the 20th of August, making in the whole 116 plans, without reference to thirty supplementary papers. "Concise statements" of the former are required to be sent in by the 17th inst., that these also may be printed, but by whom the whole will be judged is yet to be learnt. Be they who they may, we ask at their hands, on the part of the competitors, fair play and liberal consideration.

We append here as part of the same subject, rather than under a fresh heading, the following note dated Greek-street, October 8th, and signed J. L. Hale, assistant-surveyor to the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers:—

"I observe in THE BUILDER of last week, a reference made by Mr. Bird to certain experiments made by the Metropolitan Commissioners of Sewers, in Upper George-street, Edgware-road. The experiments consisted of laying down a line of 12 inch pipes in the main sewer of Upper George-street, with 9 inch junctions, to receive the drainage of the collateral sewers. The object of the experiments was to ascertain how far, in respect of quantity of sewage, the sewers in that locality were unnecessarily large, and to ascertain what were the relative merits of stoneware pipes and brick barrel drains, for the general conveyance of sewage. I enclose a printed copy of the report made to the commissioners on the result of the experiments, from which it appears the result was satisfactory. Mr. Bird, on the assumption that the experiments were a failure, stated that he "in April or May last saw the pipes broken to pieces and taken out, after putting the public to the useless expense.' Now, the fact is, that

* See p. 441 *ante*.

* The correctness, too, of some of the information furnished has been impeached by a writer in the *Times*. He says of the sections of the strata in various existing wells:—"To refer, for instance, to the thickness of the London blue clay at Goding's brewery, Southwark, it is stated to be 160 feet thick, when it is only 100 feet; the surface of the chalk also is indicated at a depth of 190 feet, when it is 345 feet. Another of these sections indicates the thickness of the blue clay at Messrs. Thorne's brewery, Westminster, to be 167 feet, when it is only 100 feet, and the chalk is stated to be 300 feet from the surface, when it is 230 feet. The section of Messrs. Seagar's, Millbank, showing the thickness of the blue clay 93 feet, is correct: and, being within 100 yards of Messrs. Thorne's, proves the inaccuracy of the latter, as the surfaces of the blue clay is of pretty uniform and gradual dip towards the west in that portion of the metropolis. I could make further comments, particularly on the anomaly of showing the blue clay resting on the chalk, when it is well known that a considerable thickness of plastic clays and sands invariably intervenes; it is, therefore, surprising to have such incorrect data issued from the Commissioners' office, which tend to throw a distrust on the whole, and are calculated to create erroneous impressions respecting the geological formation of the London basin."

† We have received beyond those given in the list, plans by Messrs. Bardwell, C. Ellerman, R. Netherway, &c.

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